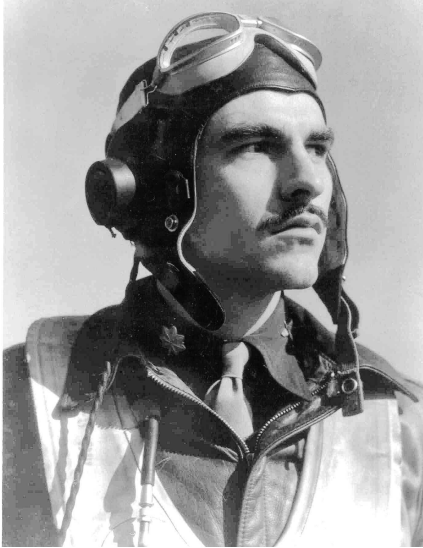


George Preddy Greensboro's Ace

Series: Aviation



Courtesy of the Greensboro
Historical Museum

Many Tar Heels have served their country as military aviators in times of war. But once in a while a pilot comes along who stands above the rest. George E. Preddy Jr. was just such a pilot.

Preddy was born on February 5, 1919. He was a competitive person who worked hard for what he wanted. He graduated from Greensboro High School at the age of sixteen by doubling up on his courses. Preddy became interested in flying in college and made his first solo flight in 1938.

That same year German chancellor Adolph Hitler was preparing to wage war in Europe. The United States proclaimed its neutrality and did not enter the conflict. But Preddy felt that his country would go to war eventually, and he wanted to be a fighter pilot. He tried to enlist in the navy three times, but he failed the physical exam each time because he was small and his spine was curved. Instead of giving up on his goal, he took a bodybuilding course and did stretching exercises to straighten his back. His hard work paid off—he passed the physical for the Army Air Corps.

On December 12, 1941, five days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Preddy was commissioned as a second lieutenant and assigned to the Ninth Pursuit Squadron in Australia. He named his first plane, a Curtiss P-40, *Tarheel* as a tribute to his home state. Preddy encountered Japanese fighters during his tour of duty, but he did not destroy any enemy planes. He flew the *Tarheel* for eight months before a midair collision put him in the hospital for four months.

Preddy was next assigned to the 352nd Fighter Group, and in July 1943 he shipped out to Bodney, England. He scored his first victory against the Luftwaffe (German air corps) on December 1 while flying a P-51 Mustang named *Cripes A'Mighty*, his favorite expression. On August 5, 1944, Preddy shot down six ME-109s in a dogfight near Berlin, Germany. He received the Distinguished Service Cross for this achievement. A few months later he became commander of his squadron.

On Christmas Day 1944 Preddy was shot down by friendly fire near Liege, Belgium. He was the highest-ranking ace in the European theater at the time of his death, with 26.83 aerial victories and 5.00 ground victories in 143 missions.

He scored two victories on his final mission. Pilots who served under Preddy said that he was an understanding, compassionate leader who was loved by his men.

In 1968 the city of Greensboro dedicated Preddy Boulevard (a portion of I-85) in honor of George Preddy and his brother Bill, a fighter pilot who was also killed during World War II. The Preddy Memorial Foundation has created a petition to have Fayetteville's Pope Air Force Base renamed Pope-Preddy Air Force Base. George Preddy's career was short, but his impact was great. North Carolinians remember our top World War II ace.